

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

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State Acquires Historic Ballona Wetlands Property

LOS ANGELES - The California Wildlife Conservation Board, Playa Capital Company LLC, and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) announced today the permanent public protection of the historic Ballona Wetlands, along with habitat and open space north of Los Angeles International Airport. The acquisition by the California Wildlife Conservation Board, completed today, successfully ends several decades' long battle between developers and environmentalists to protect the largest historic, restorable coastal wetland in Los Angeles County, where 98 percent of the coastal wetlands have been developed and destroyed. Of the 483 acres permanently protected today, the state purchased 192 acres known as Area A and Area B Residential, and accepted the donation of the 291 acre Ballona Wetlands Parcel, which includes a portion of the Ballona Creek Channel, from developer Playa Capital Company LLC.

"I commend Playa Vista for their commitment to working with the local community and State on this public-private partnership," said Mike Chrisman, Secretary of Resources. "The Ballona Wetlands project is the result of hard work by many people to provide a balance of coastal wetlands protection, economic development, and public access for the Los Angeles urban environment."

"This is truly a great accomplishment by all parties involved," said Al Wright, Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board. "This is an incredible opportunity to save and restore this once great wetland in Los Angeles. We can now move onto planning for the restoration."

The Ballona Wetlands once stretched across 1,500 acres, but as Los Angeles and surrounding cities grew, the wetlands have been reduced to less than 150 acres. The historic wetlands are a priceless educational and natural resource, where wildlife can thrive surrounded by the nation's largest metropolis. The great blue herons and brown pelicans that frequent the property thrill many of the visitors who use a bike path that skirts the edge of the historic wetlands.

"This is the most significant wetland acquisition in Southern California and its restoration will positively impact the lives of millions of Angelenos. The State, Playa Capital, environmental and community groups, the California voters, and many wonderful individuals with a vision of protection, came together to make this happen – it is a testament to California's commitment to our environment," said Reed Holderman, Executive Director of the Trust for Public Land-California. (more)

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Ruth Landsford, Executive Director of Friends of the Ballona Wetlands added, "We are thrilled this day has finally come and that we can now direct our tremendous energies and talents toward restoring this incredible wetland."

In 2001, TPL, a national nonprofit land conservation organization, struck an agreement with Playa Capital to buy and protect 192 acres of the property for wetland creation and restoration, nature preserves and urban park space. After much additional negotiating between the State, Playa Capital, and TPL, and two full appraisals to determine the fair market value of the 192 acres, Playa Capital sold Areas A and B Residential to the state for \$139 million and donated the 291 acre Ballona Wetlands Parcel.

More than 30 local and national, community and environmental groups support the transaction that has protected 483 acres of a once vast wetland.

"Thanks to the voters who passed Propositions 12 and 50, as well as the state officials who were willing to consider a different alternative, nature in the city has a much better chance for survival," says Marcia Hanscom of the Wetlands Action Network.

The funds for the purchase came from voter-approved Proposition 50 where at least \$300 million is set aside for coastal wetland acquisition and restoration in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. The California State Coastal Conservancy has set aside \$25 million from voter-approved Proposition 12 for wetland restoration and management. TPL also announced today that it will provide, at TPL's expense, stewardship for the property for a period of up to five years. The State Coastal Conservancy will lead a long-term restoration planning process for the property during this interim period.

"This acquisition will benefit the people in California forever," said Joel Reynolds of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Heal the Bay's Executive Director Mark Gold sums it up: "After 30 years of controversy surrounding LA County's most critical wetland, Heal the Bay is excited about the opportunity to finally focus on what needs to be done to enhance and restore this precious coastal resource."

For additional information on the Ballona Wetlands go to: http://resources.ca.gov/ballona_wetlands.html

TPL is a national land conservation organization dedicated to conserving land for people as parks, greenways, wilderness areas and natural, historic and cultural resources for future generations. Founded in 1972, TPL has protected more than 1.5 million acres nationwide. ###